



Robert David McCracken

1934 - 2006

As always, it seems, jobs in Oregon were hard to find in 1956, when Bob McCracken graduated from the University of Oregon and completed his minimum period of active duty in the Army Reserve. In a courtesy interview with Jack Patrick, Bob learned that if he really wanted to work as a lumber trader he should first work in a mill or two, or in the woods, and come back to see Jack when he had done so. Jack didn't remember that interview when, after several months, Bob visited Jack and announced his successful completion of the suggested period as a mill-hand. Embarrassed at not recalling the earlier suggestion, Jack agreed to try Bob at the inside work of Patrick Lumber Company. Like Jack—whom Bob eventually succeeded as its president—Bob's entire career as a lumber merchant was with Patrick Lumber Company.

Patrick Lumber Company began in Portland in 1915 and has operated continuously ever since; it continues today under new owners almost all of whom are long-time employees of the company. The firm has been exceptionally stable. Bob McCracken succeeded Jack Patrick as president in 1976. Patrick's management team during most of Bob's tenure included Ron Yeager, Tom Carstensen, and Bob, with Les Oliver as the firm's comptroller. Over the decades, the firm changed, expanded, shrunk and expanded again; it opened some new markets, and redeveloped some older ones. Periodically it bought and/or operated mills of various kinds, in several places, and under various financial arrangements. It sent its employees and its product around the world. The product was almost always manufactured lumber from the Pacific Northwest. During Bob's years at Patrick, the firm was involved for a time with tree farming, and had interests of different kinds in Blue Lake Lumber Co., Ostrom Lumber Co., Columbia Harbor Lumber Co., and others. At the same time, Patrick became a significant supplier to the United Kingdom and Australia, among others.

Bob was the second of three sons born to Paul Nazer McCracken and Grace Williams McCracken, all in the mid-Willamette Valley; his older brother Paul N. McCracken, at Dallas, and Bob and his younger brother Mike McCracken, both at Lebanon. Like his brothers, Bob attended Lebanon public schools, after which he headed straight to the University of Oregon. He took with him an Aaron Frank Scholarship, and a quiet interest in campus politics. Then followed an extraordinary four years of awards, honors, and leadership roles. Bob majored

in economics and graduated in 1956 with a Bachelor of Science degree, a love of history, a commission as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army Reserve, and little, if any—debt. Graduate school would have been a natural for Bob, but in 1956 that was not as fashionable as it would become in a few years. The military obligation was real, however. It was after fulfilling the active duty requirement appended to his commission that Bob met Jack Patrick (a decorated veteran of WWII), went to the mills, and started work at Patrick Lumber. He roomed at the Multnomah Athletic Club's bachelor member quarters, and began exploring Portland, looking for something to do in those days when Portland had few restaurants. Joan (Jody) Klahre, from Hood River, had also graduated from the University of Oregon in 1956, and ran into Bob on one of his explorations. Jody and Bob started dating in 1959, and were married in 1960. They raised their three children, a son and two daughters, first in Portland, then in Banks, Oregon. After the children were out of the house and as the commute became progressively less pleasant, they moved back to Portland.

From time to time, Bob was a photographer, an amateur woodworker, a builder by avocation, and almost a developer. With two partners, he rehabilitated two relatively small historic office buildings downtown. With several partners, he built a small shopping center, and then a mini-storage complex. His commercial buildings led him to become a commercial landlord, on a small scale, and his role of landlord morphed into that of a restaurateur, of sorts, and sometimes a lender to tenants he liked. He was fast with chain-saw, tape-measure, camera, and corkscrew, but he was somewhat challenged by air circulation systems of modern automobiles, as well as by their radios. Bob never typed, never operated a computer, and was uncomfortable when forced to speak to a tape recorder or telephone answering machine; yet he was an accomplished lumber trader, with all the conceptual and mathematical skills required by that occupation. Bob loved to learn. He was a student of history, especially English, Western European, and United States history. He read voluminously and became authoritative on the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the American Indian wars in the West. Like Jack Patrick, he was a long-time member and fan of the Oregon Historical Society. One of his goals (postponed too long, and therefore never accomplished) was to produce a documentary film about the life of Captain Jack, and that Modoc man's trial and execution at Fort Klamath. He bought, borrowed, and sometimes gifted books he deemed interesting. Occasionally, he borrowed a book from one friend and gifted it to another friend—effectively putting the book beyond the ability of the owner to recover it. Bob was a better steward of lumber than he was of books, but he really loved books.

When Bob lost much of his sight, in about his 68th year, he was valiant in pursuing restorative and corrective procedures, as well as mechanical aids of many types. He quickly adapted to the tape-recorder for books on tape (he had become a fan earlier, during his commuting years), but he never really quit buying books. He attempted to use voice activated computer software, and magnifying monitors, but was quite unsuccessful. The vision problem did not, however, keep Bob from frequent trips to, and tours of, Revolutionary and Civil War battlefields, accompanied by his friend (and part-time guide) Wade Mosby and others, taken at seasonably correct times. He occasionally claimed to have once been the best ping-pong player in Oregon; many challenge that incredible claim. He was a loyal fan of Duck football (he played in high school), and he rooted for Beavers only reluctantly—as Ducks sometimes do. He was a competitor.

Along with many others, Bob and his partners were early supporters of Bud Clark in the campaign to unseat the then-incumbent mayor of Portland. Bob served as Bud's campaign finance chairman, and Bud won the primary, thereby avoiding a runoff in the general election. Bob was then appointed to the Portland Development Commission, and he later served on Bud's committee to help select a new Chief of Police. In connection with that service, Bob met Tom Potter. Later, as Bud's successor was completing her terms in office, Bob became an early \$25 supporter of Tom's successful campaign for Mayor; again with many others, of course. Bob died just months before he might have had a chance to weigh in on one of his favorite criticisms of local government: Portland's long-standing practice of failing to properly fund and manage its Police and Firefighter Pension and Disability Fund.

Bob was a fan of the small firm, the closely-held corporation, and the quiet partnership. He was not much interested in the publicly traded, widely held forms of business, at least for the enterprises in which he participated as a principal. He eschewed advertising, publicity and self-promotion. He wanted his businesses to operate quietly and modestly, and to carry honorable reputations with their competitors and customers. Even as Bob neared retirement in 2001, he remained an active lumberman at this quintessential closely-held wholesale lumber company. That was his day job, and he did it well.

July 2006